

# Framing the Transitions

Sunday, September 15, 2013, 16.00–18.00, Hotel InterContinental

In cooperation with the International Visegrad Fund

**Opening Remarks:** Barbara Haig, Michael Žantovský, Tarek Osman

**Moderator:** Christopher Walker

## Talk focused on whether a liberal democracy is a main goal for societies now in transition

Demands for change manifested in “The Arab Spring” have taken many forms but share a common factor – a demand for greater representation and accountability from those in power. *“This is a consensus expectation,”* said Egyptian-born analyst **Tarek Osman**, author of *Egypt on the Brink*, published on the eve of the revolution in his homeland. This demand often fails to embrace the classic form of Western liberal democracy, he said.

A national consensus on what changes should take place is often absent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In Egypt, there is no real agreement about to what extent the military should give up its past power, or, in Morocco, to what extent “the Palace” should give up its political role, Osman said. The region’s reformers have shunned the painful economic reforms and dumping of price supports that were a feature of the new democracies in post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe, said **Michael Žantovský**, Czech ambassador to the U.K.

Demographic change is one of the biggest factors fuelling demands for change across the Arab world, he said. *“When I was born, the population of the Arab world was 180 million, it is now 340 million. And about two thirds are in their teens,”* Osman said. *“[Their ambitions] are the dominant factor and existing institutions are vastly disconnected from these guys.”*

Former Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs **Gareth Evans** warned there were no quick fixes for many of the countries facing change. The single most important factor for those seeking to help the transition was to contribute to building the institutions in place, he said. In much of the Arab world, Osman said, the economic formulas being pushed by institutions such as the World Bank and IMF represented an attack on food subsidies that benefit the poor.